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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 ROME 000851

SIPDIS

S/SRAP FOR KAREN HANRAHAN
SCA/A FOR ARIELLA VIEHE
EUR/RPM FOR AARON COPE AND RAPHAEL CARLAND

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TAGS: PREL PGOV MARR MOPS NATO IT AF
SUBJECT: AFGHANISTAN: ITALY TO KEEP ELECTION SECURITY
FORCES IN PLACE THROUGH OCTOBER

REF: STATE 74362

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Classified By: Political Minister-Counselor Barbara A. Leaf for Reasons
1.4 (B) and (D)

¶1. (C) Summary: The GOI is looking at ways to enhance its support for Afghanistan after the August 20 presidential elections. It has a bill before Parliament authorizing Euro 509 million for Italian overseas security and peacekeeping missions through October 2009. The bill, which passed the lower house on July 23 and is expected to pass the Senate next week, provides Euro 213 million to keep its 400 Election Support Force (ESF) troops on the ground in Afghanistan through October. The bill also creates an MFA-led Task Force on Afghanistan and Pakistan designed to streamline approvals for development assistance and promote the use of quick-impact projects. Italy will also provide 2-3 additional civilian experts in response to Kai Eide's call for a "civilian surge." Finally, the bill provides funds for up to 160 Carabinieri police trainers to join the 40 currently training Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP). The GOI hopes that it will be given a high-profile role in the NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A) in recognition of this commitment. Although all of these measures are in line with commitments already made at the NATO Strasbourg-Kehl Summit in April, it has been unclear until now whether those in the GOI who favor maintaining a strong commitment in Afghanistan would be able to overcome the resistance of those who favor cuts in the defense and aid budgets. The fact that the bill provides full funding for these initiatives demonstrates that Afghanistan remains a central priority for PM Berlusconi, who regards this as much a personal commitment to President Obama as to Afghanistan.
End Summary

¶2. (SBU) We delivered reftel demarche to Italian MFA Coordinator for Afghanistan Sergio Mercuri and MFA Political-Military Director Massimo Marrotti on July 22. Mercuri said that Italian Af-Pak Special Envoy Massimo Iannucci is focused on the post-election scenario and is studying the Afghan Government's request, issued through UNAMA on June 22, for additional civilian assistance. In response to UNAMA's July 8 call for a "civilian surge," the

GOI plans to provide two or three additional aid experts to be funded via Italy's contribution to the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF). The Euro 509 million overseas missions bill currently before Parliament also contains a provision for launching an MFA-led Task Force on Afghanistan and Pakistan -- a project of FM Frattini's that grew out of the G8 Af-Pak Conference at Trieste. The Task Force would streamline approvals for development assistance proposals and promote the use of quick-impact projects.

Mercuri told us that S/E Iannucci realized that Italy needed a quick-impact capability after he visited refugee camps in Pakistan. The task force will draw on the Euro 28 million provided in the bill for overseas development assistance in addition to previously appropriated funds.

¶13. (SBU) Pol-Mil Director Massimo Marrotti separately told us that Italy looks favorably upon the early results of GEN McChrystal's review of ISAF efforts and has come to similar conclusions about the need to extend Election Support Forces through the fall. The overseas missions bill provides funding (Euro 213 million) to keep Italian troop levels at 3,200 or above through October, and the 400 ESF troops will likely stay on until then regardless of whether a second ballot is required. After that point, however, ESF funding is uncertain and MFA and MOD planners are considering transferring some Italian troops from Kabul to Herat if current high levels of insurgent activity in RC-West continue.

Carabinieri Trainers: Italy Still Holds out Hope for a Key Role in NTM-A

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¶14. (C) The bill also includes sufficient funding for up to 160 Carabinieri police trainers to join the 40 currently training Afghan National Civil Order Police (ANCOP), per the commitment PM Berlusconi made to President Obama during their June 15 meeting in Washington. Marrotti stressed that while Berlusconi's commitment of up to 200 police trainers is "solid," there has been some frustration in MFA and MOD circles over a perceived tendency on the U.S. and NATO's part to favor the as-yet undefined French police training contribution over Italy's. Italy would like to see the size of its commitment (which would make it the Carabinieri's largest police training mission abroad) reflected in the structure of the new NATO Training Mission in Afghanistan (NTM-A). Finally, the bill contains an additional Euro 1 million for the Afghan National Army Trust Fund.

¶15. (C) Comment: Italian interlocutors often hide behind their country's budgetary woes to justify the Berlusconi government's decision not to direct more funding toward overseas security commitments. This bill, however, demonstrates that in the area of Afghanistan, at least, MOD and MFA planners are grappling seriously with the problem of funding Italy's biggest overseas mission and that they have the political support from on high to do so. The death of an Italian soldier in Farah province last week -- Italy's first combat fatality in Afghanistan since February 2008 -- has not diminished support for the mission within the governing majority or the opposition. In part this reflects the personal commitment of MOD La Russa (who visited Italian troops in Afghanistan on July 20-21) and FM Frattini; more importantly, however, it is a product of PM Berlusconi's personal commitment to President Obama to do more in Afghanistan and Pakistan.

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